Why Politicians Seem So Rude and How It Affects Citizens

Rasmus Skytte

Why Politicians Seem So Rude and How It Affects Citizens

PhD Dissertation

Politica

© Forlaget Politica and the author 2019

ISBN: 978-87-7335-243-4

Cover: Svend Siune
Print: Fællestrykkeriet, Aarhus University

Submitted November 10, 2018
The public defense takes place January 25, 2019
Published January 2019

Forlaget Politica
c/o Department of Political Science
Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University
Bartholins Allé 7
DK-8000 Aarhus C
Denmark

Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation was hard, and I could not have done it without the help of many friends and colleagues. Hopefully, most of them already know how grateful I am of their support, but they certainly also deserve to be acknowledged in writing.

First, I would like to thank my main supervisor. Rune Slothuus is a uniquely talented scholar who has taught me the importance of asking the right research questions and always encouraged me to strive ever higher. At the same time, he is also extremely good company and a lot of fun to be around, and I am glad that he agreed to supervise my project. Second, I would like to thank my co-supervisor, Rune Stubager, who, alongside Slothuus, has tirelessly read and reread my manuscripts. Whenever Slothuus has asked me to take a step back and look at the big picture, Stubager has been sure to remind me that you also need to take (at least some) steps forward to actually write a dissertation. Stubager should also be applauded for his subtle humor, making our supervision meetings a lot more fun to attend.

I would also like to thank Hærværksgruppen, which consists of Jonas Gejl Pedersen, Mathilde Cecchini, Jakob Majlund Holm and Mette Bisgaard. They have made these past three years more colorful and festive than I had ever imagined writing a dissertation could be. In the group, we can discuss anything from Hegel to standard errors and still get home at 5 am, which is exactly the combination of intellect and disorder that I so enjoy. Of course, there are also many other colleagues at the department

who deserve a warm thank you for being good friends and for commenting on various parts of my dissertation. Of special importance to me are Martin Vinæs Larsen, Mathias Osmundsen, Lasse Laustsen, Philipp Pechmann, Julian Christensen, Morten Pettersson, Martin Bisgaard, Suthan Krishnarajan, Kristina Jessen Hansen, Casper Sakstrup, Andreas Albertsen, Nikolaj Andersen, Alexander Bor, Troels Bøggild, Maiken Gelardi, Filip Kiil, Alexander Taaning, Frederik Jørgensen, Oluf Gøtzsche-Astrup, Rasmus Brun Pedersen, Viki Møller, and Josh Robison.

I am also indebted to many people outside the department who have helped me progress or simply provided good company along the way. In particular, I would like to thank Matt Levendusky and Diana Mutz, whose warmth and hospitality made my stay in Philadelphia both entertaining and instructive. I also owe a lot of gratitude to my old master's thesis supervisor, Asmus Leth Olsen, and to Emilie Frank, who coauthored the thesis. Without them, I would probably not have entered academia. The same can be said of Peter Heyn Nielsen. Without our endless conversations at Haraldsborg, I would not have made it through political science.

The administrative staff has also helped me immensely in these past three years. In particular, I am indebted to Ruth Ramm, Birgit Kanstrup, Susanne Vang, Malene Poulsen, and Annette Andersen for helping me solve a wide variety of problems (many of them caused by own negligence).

Lastly, I cannot thank Marie enough for supporting me along the way. She has been a solid rock throughout these three years, tolerating long work hours and providing me with encouragement when things looked bleak. Her very presence has always been good at reminding me that there are much more important things in life than writing a good dissertation.

Contents

Page

1 If Everyone Hates Incivility, Why Are Politicians So Rude? 4

2 How Citizens and Media Respond to Elite Incivility 11

3 Three Methodological Challenges 22

4 Main Findings 29

5 Discussion: The Unanswered Questions 37

6 Danish and English Summaries 50

Chapter 1

If Everyone Hates Incivility, Why Are Politicians So Rude?

Disagreement is inherent in democratic politics.[1] People have always differed on how material and immaterial resources should be distributed and competing demands are a central part of classic theories of democracy (e.g., Dahl 1961; Easton 1953). However, scholars and other observers are becoming increasingly concerned that politicians are no longer capable of expressing such disagreement without also being disagreeable (Shea and Fiorina 2013). Many fear that politics is becoming infested with shouting and name-calling and that insults are gradually replacing arguments in political debates. This concern has been particularly great in the United States where incivility in politics has been on both the public and scholarly agenda for decades. Numerous books and articles have been published, lamenting the loss of respectful dialogue among politicians (e.g., Ahuja 2008; Herbst 2010; Uslaner 1993), and several organizations have been created to make elite discourse more civil (e,g., the National Institute for Civil Discourse and the Institute for Civility in Government). Members of Congress have

[1] The research presented in the present dissertation was supported by the Danish Council for Independent Research through a Sapere Aude grant to Rune Slothuus (DFF-4003-00192B).

even gone on so-called "civility retreats" to improve comity on Capitol Hill (LaHood and Mackaman 2015), yet harsh rhetoric still seems to be on the rise, and to many observers, the election of Donald Trump took incivility to a still higher level (Bybee 2018).

The research to date, which focuses mostly on the American case, indicates that there are indeed reasons to worry about rude behavior in politics. Not only does elite incivility appear to be growing in the United States (Ahuja 2008; Dodd and Schraufnagel 2013; Uslaner 1993), it also creates political alienation and negative views of politicians. Specifically, the perhaps most consistent finding in the growing literature is that people trust politicians less and evaluate them less favorably if they behave uncivilly (e.g., Paris 2017; Mutz and Reeves 2005; Mutz 2007, 2015, cf. Brooks and Geer 2007). This indicates that citizens expect elected officials to obey the same norms of politeness that regulate their own everyday interactions, and that some of the growing resentment toward American politicians might be explained by the rise of elite incivility (Mutz 2015). Furthermore, recent studies have found that even partisans, who are often unwilling to admit mistakes by their party (e.g., Gaines et al. 2007), evaluate their own side and leaders less favorably in the face of uncivil attacks on the opposition (Druckman et al. 2018; Frimer and Skitka 2018). In sum, it appears that norms of politeness are very strong, and that the dislike for incivility runs very deep among citizens.

However, if voters dislike uncivil politicians, why are politicians so uncivil? On the face of it, it seems paradoxical that scholars find incivility to be both widespread among politicians and loathed intensely by ordinary people. After all, politicians are in the business of attracting voters, so it would seem more sensible for them to be respectful to their opponents. Of course, politicians might get caught in the heat of the moment from time to time and say things that they later regret, yet it seems strange that so many of them would continually undermine their chances with the voters. Are politicians that ignorant about how citizens respond to their behavior?

This puzzling observation—that citizens dislike incivility, but that incivility nevertheless seems very common among at least American politicians—is the starting point of the present dissertation. However, the purpose of the dissertation is not to explain why politicians are rude or to map all the reasons that politicians might have for insulting their opponents. Rather, the dissertation deals with the paradox by taking a new look at the two premises that underlie it. That is, I examine whether citizens really like politicians less if they behave uncivilly, and I also examine whether uncivil discourse is really as common among politicians as it seems. Often, what appears to be a paradox is the result of starting from the wrong premises, but such puzzles can nevertheless be useful in helping us question what we think we know is true. At least, this is what I hope to do in the dissertation, which leads me to pose the following research question:

> *How common is elite incivility, and to what extent and under what conditions is it punished by citizens?*[2]

I answer this question through three self-contained articles. The first article focuses on the second half of the research question, the second article focuses on both halves, and the third article focuses on the first half. All three are concerned solely with incivility in American politics, which is the context in which incivility has been studied and debated most intensely in recent years. However, this does not mean that the dissertation is not relevant for students of Danish politics, which is a topic I return to in the last chapter of this summary report. An overview of the articles and the data used can be found in Table 1.1 below.[3]

[2]The word "punish" is used in a rather broad sense in the present dissertation to refer to citizens lowering their evaluations of or losing trust in politicians. However, I do not examine vote choice in the dissertation.

[3]When describing the individual articles and their results in this summary report (chapters one to five), some phrases and paragraphs have been taken more or less directly from the the articles (chapters six to eight) to maintain consistency.

Table 1.1: Overview of articles

Article	Status	Observational data	Experimental data
Article A: Dimensions of Elite Partisan Polarization	Invited to be revised and resubmitted to British Journal of Political Science	Survey administered to convenience sample (MTurk, N=510)	Survey experiment in nationally representative survey (YouGov, N=1,616) Survey experiment administered to convenience sample (MTurk, N=1,516)
Article B: Degrees of Disrespect	Working paper	Four post-election surveys (Pew Research Center, N=5,277) Crowdsourced content analysis of tweets (N=24,000)	Two survey experiments in nationally representative surveys (YouGov and Survey Sampling International, N=4,052) Two survey experiments administered to convenience samples (MTurk, N=5,207)
Article C: The Visual Incivility Bias	Working paper	Crowdsourced content analysis of images (N=8,615)	Two survey experiments administered to convenience samples (MTurk, N=1,707)

Note: The experiments used in Article A are also used in Article B.

In the first article (Article A: Dimensions of Elite Partisan Polarization), I raise the possibility that it is not incivility that citizens dislike, but substantive disagreement and extreme policy positions. Though shouting and name-calling often go hand in hand with extreme views, there is no necessary connection between the level of incivility and the level of issue polarization (Mutz 2015, 2017; Schraufnagel 2005).[4] However, the term "polarization" is often used ambiguously in the literature to describe both dimensions of elite conflict (Persily 2015), and typical research designs in prior studies have not been well-suited for disentangling their effects. For instance, in experimental studies of incivility, participants have often been exposed to harsh rhetoric featuring ideologically-laden insults that also signal divergent issue positions (e.g., Gervais 2015, 2018). Thus, it might be the case that citizens are not as allergic to harsh rhetoric as prior studies would suggest, which is a possibility I explore on the basis of two survey

[4]Also, see Paris (2017) for a similar point on civility and bipartisanship

experiments and one survey without an experiment.

In the second article (Article B: Degrees of Disrespect), I explore whether and to what extent incivility makes partisans lower their evaluations of their own side, which recent experimental studies have suggested that it does (Druckman et al. 2018; Frimer and Skitka 2018). Specifically, I rely on theories of motivated reasoning to suggest that the *degree of incivility* is crucial for how partisans react to rude behavior, and that out-party politicians are punished for even moderate breaches of decorum, while partisans' evaluations of their own leaders are only affected by more extreme insults. Furthermore, I also examine how common different degrees of incivility are in actual elite communication to determine whether typical incivility hurts evaluations among both in- and out-partisans or only among the latter group. The data employed in Article B comes from four survey experiments, a large crowdsourced content analysis of political communication, and post-election surveys from four presidential elections.

In the third article (Article C: The Visual Incivility Bias), I further explore how rude politicians are, and I also examine the role of the media in shaping perceptions of incivility. In particular, I argue that to understand why politicians often seem so brutish, we need to look at how they are visually portrayed in the news. My overall hypothesis in this article is that visuals depicting politicians engaged in rude behavior (such as shouting, cross-talking, and pointing at each other) are systematically overrepresented in the news and that such visuals have powerful effects on the extent to which politicians are perceived as uncivil. Specifically, I expect that visuals signaling uncivil behavior not only make politicians seem ruder, they will also decrease how much people rely on verbal and written information when forming perceptions of incivility. These claims are tested by relying on two survey experiments and a large crowdsourced content analysis of images from presidential debates, newspapers, and stock photo archives.

Overall, the dissertation shows that we need to reconsider the two premises from which the paradox emerged. First, incivility is not punished by cit-

izens to the extent that prior research might indicate. While it is indeed incivility and not issue polarization that makes people lose trust in politicians, partisans seldom punish their own politicians for being uncivil. To be sure, partisans do lower their evaluations of their leaders if they are extremely rude, but politicians are seldom that uncivil when they attack each other. Second, while the media might give the impression that politicians are always at each other's throats, this is to some extent a result of the visual news material that they choose to bring. Of course, these result do not imply that politicians are never punished for being uncivil, or that politicians are never rude to one another, but they do indicate that the paradox outlined earlier is not as paradoxical as it seemed at first.

Besides providing valuable insights to the literatures on polarization and incivility in politics, the dissertation also makes several methodological contributions. For instance, in the second article, I show how to examine systematically the external validity of experimental treatment material by first mapping the real-life distribution of the independent variable using crowd-sourced content analysis. This method can be used to evaluate whether treatment material is "unrealistically powerful" or "rarely occurs in natural settings" (Kinder and Palfrey 1993, 27), which are concerns that experimental political scientists often face (Barabas and Jerit 2010). The method is particularly useful in situations where different operationalizations lead to different results, since it enables researchers to discuss the external validity of treatment material on the basis of more than anecdotal evidence and gut feelings.

Another important methodological contribution is made in the third article where I present a method for overcoming "the problem of the unobserved population" (see, e.g., Groeling and Baum 2009) when studying visual communication. The problem is that to show that the selection of news material is biased in some way, we need information about not only what the news media report, but also the total population of potential news elements from which they are sampling (i.e., the population of what they

could be reporting), which is usually not available (Ibid.). However, by comparing the visual material in televised debates, which are video recorded in full length, to the visual material used in later news coverage, it is possible for me to overcome this challenge. While my specific goal in the third article is to examine whether the media portray politicians as more uncivil than they are, the method presented can easily be transferred to study other types of visual biases, such as those related to gender or partisanship.

The rest of the dissertation is structured as follows: In the next chapter, I provide the theoretical framework for the dissertation. That is, I explain what incivility is and how citizen and media respond to it, and I also motivate three sub-questions that I answer in the individual articles. In the third chapter, I give an overview of the methods used in the dissertation with a special emphasis on three methodological problems of general interest that I try to solve. In the fourth chapter, I present the main results from my articles, and in the fifth chapter, I discuss my findings and how they might be relevant for Danish politics. The articles follow at the end, in chapters six, seven, and eight.

Chapter 2

How Citizens and Media Respond to Elite Incivility

In this chapter, I first define incivility and contrast it to related concepts. Then follow two sections in which I critically discuss each of the premises underlying the paradox outlined in the introduction (i.e., that citizens dislike uncivil politicians and that elite incivility is widespread). In these sections, I also put forth three subquestions, which the articles set out to answer.

What is Incivility?

Incivility is a slippery concept. As several scholars have noted, it is easy to recognize when you see it, but much harder to define (e.g., Maisel 2012, 405). Nevertheless, definitions are necessary to study a phenomenon scientifically, and in this dissertation, I define incivility as communication perceived by citizens to violate norms of politeness (for a somewhat similar definition, see Mutz 2007, 2015). Four things are worth noting about this definition.

First, incivility is here defined as a lack of politeness, and rudeness and incivility can, therefore, be used as synonyms. However, scholars like Papacharissi (2004) argue that we should avoid using these terms interchangeably since this “conflation ignores the democratic merit of robust and heated

discussion" (Ibid.). While I am sympathetic to this argument, it rests on the premise that incivility is inherently undesirable, and that the concept should be defined in ways that encompass only unwanted behaviors. However, I use incivility as a descriptive and not as an evaluative concept, and I believe that the normative value of incivility should be judged on the basis of its effects, not determined a priori. This is also why I am skeptical of Papacharissi's definition of civility, which is "behaviors that enhance democratic conversation." Here, civility (and hence, also incivility) is defined in terms of its effects, making redundant the empirical examination of just that (for a similar argument, see Mutz 2015, footnote 8).

Second, by stressing that incivility is communication *perceived by citizens* to violate norms of politeness, the definition makes clear that incivility cannot be reduced to a set of objectively rude phrases or behaviors. Perceptions of what is uncivil will vary across time and space, and people will not always agree on how to categorize a specific piece of communication. Yet it is not completely subjective or arbitrary what people consider to be rude. Within a given culture, people have some shared norms of what constitutes civil behavior in different settings, and specific words and acts carry conventionalized meanings which ensure that our judgments do not fall far from each other (Culpeper 2010, 2011). Furthermore, while we cannot speak of a specific piece of communication as being objectively more uncivil than another piece of communication, we can rate them according to how they are *on average perceived by citizens* within a given society, which is something I explore in Article B.

Third, the definition refers to *communication*, but it does not restrict incivility to acts of verbal or written communication. In studies of rudeness and politeness in interpersonal communication, researchers typically describe three ways of signaling respect or disrespect for others (e.g., Brunet et al. 2012; Culpeper 2011). One is verbal (e.g., name-calling), the second is para-verbal (e.g., shouting), and the last is non-verbal (e.g., pointing or making faces). To date, scholars studying incivility in politics have focused

most on verbal content, but the present dissertation studies both verbal and non-verbal displays of rudeness.

Fourth, while the definition does not restrict incivility to communication by politicians, the present dissertation does not focus on incivility from other sources such as bloggers or ordinary citizens on social media (see, e.g., Anderson et al. 2014; Borah 2014; Gervais 2015). As my overall research question makes clear, the goal is solely to understand how citizens react to rude behavior by politicians and to understand how widespread such behavior is.[1]

While defining incivility helps us understand what it is, it might also be useful to contrast it with related concepts. For instance, incivility should not be confused with negativity (Mutz 2015, 28), at least not in the directional sense of the term usually employed in the literature on negative campaigning (see Dowling et al. 2016; Lau and Rovner 2009). Here, being negative is often defined as speaking about one's opponents instead of speaking about oneself, but politicians can be both rude or polite when they criticize other politicians, and two concepts are therefore distinct (Brooks and Geer 2007; Fridkin and Kenney 2004, 2011). Furthermore, the directional definition of negativity can be used to classify only written or verbal acts, whereas the concept of incivility can also be used to characterize non-verbal and para-verbal behavior as explained above.

Lastly, incivility should not be confused with issue polarization, which concerns the distance in terms of policy positions between the parties and their internal homogeneity (e.g., Levendusky 2009, 2010; McCarty et al. 2016). Incivility and issue polarization certainly covary to some extent in the real world, but there is no necessary connection between them (Mutz 2015; Schraufnagel 2005, see Paris 2017 for a similar point on civility and

[1] Furthermore, the dissertation is also limited to focusing only on incivility between politicians from different parties. That is, intra-party incivility and uncivil behavior toward citizens or the media are not studied.

bipartisanship). Politicians can disagree about policies without degrading one another, but they can also engage in mudslinging without actually disagreeing much (Ibid.).

Citizens Dislike Uncivil Politicians, Right?

The majority of studies in the literature on incivility have focused on how it affects citizens (Sobieraj and Berry 2011), and the perhaps most consistent finding is that citizens lose trust in politicians and evaluate them less favorably if they behave uncivilly (e.g., Paris 2017; Mutz and Reeves 2005; Mutz 2007, 2015, cf. Brooks and Geer 2007). According to Mutz and Reeves (2005), who studied the effects of televised incivility between politicians, this happens because people apply norms for everyday discourse when evaluating politicians. They write:

> When political actors engage in televised interactions that violate the norms for everyday, face-to-face discourse, they reaffirm viewers' sense that politicians cannot be counted on to obey the same norms for social behavior by which ordinary citizens abide. [...] To be sure, the actual norms for behavior on television are very different from what they are in the world of everyday social interaction. But [...] when political actors violate interpersonal social norms on television, viewers react as they would if they were witnessing the same interaction in real life. (Ibid., 2-3)

In other words, while politicians may often diverge from the norms that regulate everyday social interactions, citizens still expect them to abide by these, and they evaluate them less favorably if they do not.

Furthermore, recent studies show that even partisans punish their own side for being rude, affirming the strength of these norms. For instance, Frimer and Skitka (2018) have found that incivility "decreases politicians public approval, even with their political base." Drawing on "Big Two"

theories of social perception, they argue that this effect occurs because everyone, regardless of political loyalties, will see a politician as less warm when he or she breaches norms of politeness. In a similar vein, Druckman et al. (2018) have found that uncivil media content lowers in-party affect if the source is affiliated with one's party. That is, when partisans are exposed to harsh insults in opinion and news shows associated with their party, they will like their own party less than if the rhetoric was civil. Druckman et al. (2018) argue that this effect occurs because incivility creates negative emotional reactions, which in turn lead to a weakened sense of belonging and increased partisan ambivalence (Ibid.).

In sum, it seems well-established that citizens dislike elite incivility, and there are even studies showing partisans to punish their own side for being uncivil. However, if this is the case, why does uncivil behavior seem so common in politics? On the face of it, it would seem that many politicians are continually, and perhaps even deliberately, undermining their own chances of being elected. Are politicians really that ignorant? Or is it instead our assumption about how much people dislike uncivil politicians that needs to be revised? In the first and the second of my articles, I explore the latter option and present two arguments for why citizens might not punish politicians to the extent that we think they do.

In Article A, I argue that we know surprisingly little about the unique effects of incivility. To be sure, there is no lack of studies claiming to study the effects of incivility, but typical research designs have not been well-suited for disentangling the effects of rude behavior from the effects of politicians disagreeing substantively about politics. For instance, in experimental studies of incivility, participants have typically been exposed to political debate featuring ideologically-laden insults, and in observational studies, researchers have typically not controlled for the level of issue polarization (e.g., Gervais 2015, 2018; Forgette and Morris 2006).

Against this background, the purpose of Article A is to separate the effects of these two dimensions of elite conflict on a set of important out-

comes frequently studied in the literature. Most importantly for the topic of this section, I examine whether it is incivility or issue polarization—or perhaps both—that makes citizens lose trust in politicians. In the literature on issue polarization, several authors have argued that the issue positions of members of Congress have become significantly more polarized than those of the general American public and that this discrepancy creates distrust (e.g., Citrin and Stoker 2018, 57; King 1997). Thus, it is not unlikely that it is extreme issue positions that citizens are reacting to. After all, incivility merely concerns the manner in which politicians deliberate, whereas the substantive positions of politicians can have real consequences for the policies enacted and for people's lives. Thus, my first sub-question is the following:

> SQ1: What are the unique effects of elite incivility and issue polarization on trust in politicians?

In Article B, I explore another reason why we might be overestimating the extent to which citizens dislike uncivil politicians. Specifically, while recent studies by Frimer and Skitka (2018) and Druckman et al. (2018) have found that partisans readily punish their own side for rude behavior, I suggest these results only hold when partisans are exposed to relatively extreme insults,[2] and that lesser degrees of incivility will affect evaluations of only out-party politicians. Furthermore, I also raise the possibility that such

[2]Both Druckman et al. (2018) and Frimer and Skitka (2018) rely on relatively extreme incivility in most of their experiments. For instance, in the treatment material used by Druckman et al. (2018), opponents are referred to as "parasitic," "weak and despicable," and "bottom-feeding." Similarly, in two of their experiments, Frimer and Skitka (2018) use President Trump's tweets to the hosts of the television show "Morning Joe" as treatment. In these, Trump refers to Joe Scarborough as "psycho Joe" and to Mika Brzezinski as "crazy" and "low-IQ," and he also says that she was "bleeding badly from a face-lift." Furthermore, in the one study (study 5) where Frimer and Skitka (2018) rely on less extreme incivility, they actually find that partisans do not punish their own side, which is consistent with my theory.

extreme incivility might not be very typical of the incivility usually found in communication by top-level politicians.[3]

My theoretical starting point in Article B is the idea that supporting a party is not just an instrumental, but also an expressive act, and that partisans have a desire to distinguish their group positively from other groups (Huddy et al. 2015). Thus, in the minds of partisans, uncivil behavior will not just be an informative cue about how warm a politician is or how much he or she respects common norms. Depending on whether it comes from an in-party or an out-party source, such behavior can also be a potential threat to the image of their side as morally superior, or a welcomed opportunity to criticize the other side. Therefore, I expect that partisans will usually rely on their partisanship when interpreting how uncivil a specific act or piece of communication is, and that they will try to steer clear of the conclusion that their side has done anything wrong. For instance, they might excuse their side by pointing to contextual factors, or they might argue that the meaning of a specific word or phrase is not as bad as it seems. Prior research has already shown that in-party politicians are usually seen as far more civil and fair than politicians from the opposing party (Muddiman 2017; Stevens et al. 2008, 2015), and our initial expectation would therefore be that partisans only punish out-party politicians for rude behavior.

However, research on motivated reasoning also shows that reality can set boundaries to the conclusions that partisans can draw (Leeper and Slothuus 2014), which is why the degree of incivility is an important factor to consider. For instance, partisans' evaluations of factual affairs have been found to converge when the evidence is clearly unambiguous (Parker-Stephen 2013), and it has also been found that extensive disconfirming

[3]It is important to note that Druckman et al. (2018) are not interested in incivility by politicians, but by partisan media. Article B dos not examine how common incivility stemming from such sources are, and the article thus says nothing about how representative the treatment material used by Druckman et al. 2018 is.

evidence can produce a tipping point at which motivated reasoners begin more accurately updating their evaluations of candidates (Redlawsk et al. 2010). Thus, it might be the case that when partisans are confronted with very strong incivility (i.e., incivility which citizens within a given society on average perceive to be really harsh), they will actually punish their own side. In particular, some behaviors, phrases, and words (e.g., "cunt") might carry conventionalized meanings that are so unambiguously negative that it is hard for partisans to construe them as anything but insulting (see Culpeper 2010).

Against this background, my overall theoretical expectation in Article C is that only rather strong incivility will make partisans punish their own side. However, it might be of little practical interest that partisans are theoretically capable of punishing in-party incivility if they are only responsive to insults far stronger than those usually found in real-life communication. Therefore, the purpose of Article C is not just to test how the degree of incivility affects partisan reactions; I also to examine how common it is for politicians to behave so rudely that not only the out-party but also their own side evaluates them less favorably.

> SQ2: How does the degree of incivility affect the extent to which partisans punish in-party incivility, and how common are different degrees of incivility in real communication by politicians?

Elite Incivility Is Everywhere, Right?

Political observers and citizens frequently decry the breakdown of civility in politics. For instance, in Quinnipiac poll in July 2018, a whopping 91 percent of Americans said that the lack of civility in politics was a "serious problem" (Quinnipiac Polling Institute 2018), and the surge of academic interest in political incivility has also been driven by the belief that rude behavior is both rising and common in politics. On incivility in Congress,

(Uslaner 1993) writes:

> We are no longer polite to each other. We do not trust each other as much as we once did. Few places show this waning of norms, this decline of comity, as clearly as the U.S. Congress, both the House and the Senate. (Ibid., 2)

However, some scholars have pointed out that the evidence presented to date does not necessarily support the idea that incivility has been rising among politicians. For instance, York (2013) argues that studies of incivility over time often rely on anecdotal or indirect evidence and that more direct indicators do not necessarily show an increase

> Objective "baseline" indicators of incivility are lacking, with some scholars using congressional party-line voting (Ahuja, 2008) or self-report measures of disregard for cordiality in the U.S. House of Representatives (Uslaner, 1993) as indirect proxies of incivility. [...] Another, more explicit measure of elite political incivility has been presented by [Jamieson (2011) who] tracks the number of times words spoken on the floor of the House of Representatives are "taken down" or ruled out of order [...] Using this method [...] elite incivility is not on an upward trend. (York 2013)

In the present dissertation, I do not settle this debate about whether politicians are more uncivil now than they were in prior decades. However, I do argue that the lack of clear evidence in favor of rising incivility should make us consider whether there are other reasons for why rude behavior seems so common among politicians. In particular, I follow York (2013) in arguing that the behavior of the media might play an important role in shaping perceptions of elite incivility, which is a possibility I explore in Article C.

The overall argument tested in Article C is that the media might be overrepresenting visual material in which politicians appear uncivil and

that this might be part of the reason why politicians appear so rude in the eyes of the public. On the face of it, it might seem strange to focus on visual and not written material, which is what political scientists and communication scholars usually do, but I expect images to be crucial in shaping perceptions of incivility for at least two reasons. First, as I have already mentioned, people rely heavily on non- and para-verbal cues (such as rude gestures and shouting) when forming perceptions of incivility Culpeper 2011; Sydnor 2018), and these cues are often easy to decode from images. Second, images have certain qualities that can make their effects on perceptions and opinions very powerful. For instance, they are attention-grabbing (e.g., Graber 1996), memorable (e.g., Paivio and Csapo 1973) and they possess a true-to-life quality, which is usually known as indexicality (Messaris and Abraham 2001). That is, they come with an implicit guarantee of being closer to the truth than other forms of communication, which might diminish the likelihood that viewers question what they see (Ibid.).

I expect that the media will overrepresent images in which politicians appear uncivil since depictions of conflictual social behavior are likely more attention-grabbing than depictions of non-conflictual behavior. Thus, such images can help the media attract readers and viewers. I base this expectation on research from a wide range of disciplines which shows that people usually pay more attention to negative information than to positive and neutral information (e.g., Rozin and Royzman 2001; Trussler and Soroka 2014). Furthermore, I also argue in Article C that it will be quite easy for the media to depict politicians visually in just the way they want to, since photographers, editors, and journalists have in recent decades gained a lot of freedom when it comes to choosing visuals for political news. Not only have cameras improved, but the number of them has also increased, and both developments have expanded the pool of images to choose from. Furthermore, the rise of televised image bites (i.e., clips where politicians are seen, but not heard) have also made the visual choices far less restrained by what the politicians are saying (Bucy and Grabe 2007).

SQ3: To what extent does the media overrepresent images in which politicians appear uncivil, and how do such images affect perceptions of incivility among citizens?

Chapter Summary

If everyone hates incivility, why are politicians so rude? In the present chapter, I have provided three challenges to the two premises underlying this apparent paradox. First, I have suggested that it might not be incivility, but substantive disagreement, that citizens are allergic to. Second, I have proposed that partisans will punish their own side only for extreme incivility, and I have argued that it is unclear how common (or uncommon) this is when politicians attack each other in real life. Third, I have suggested that the media might make politicians seem more uncivil than they are through their visual coverage of politics.

Chapter 3

Three Methodological Challenges

To answer the three sub-questions, I rely on a multitude of data and methods. Specifically, the dissertation is based on six surveys with embedded experiments, five surveys without experiments, and two crowdsourced content analyses. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to go into detail with every method and dataset, as this would be both cumbersome and add little to the overall understanding of the dissertation. Instead, this chapter is structured around three fundamental methodological challenges that I seek to overcome in the articles. The challenges relate to my three questions, but they also speak to ongoing and general methodological debates in the literatures on political behavior and communication.

First Challenge: Experimental Confounding

Is it incivility or issue polarization—or perhaps both—that make citizens lose trust in politicians? As I explained in the previous chapter, this question is hard to answer on the basis of existing research as the two dimensions of conflict have often been empirically confounded. For instance, in experimental studies of incivility, participants have often been exposed to political

debate featuring ideologically-laden insults that also signal that policy positions are far apart. Thus, the purpose of my first article is to separate carefully the effects of incivility from those of issue polarization.

On the face of it, this would seem like an easy task. To determine the unique effects of incivility, researchers could simply avoid using insults with ideological connotations in their experimental treatment material. However, following such a strategy will not necessarily solve our problems of confounding. As Dafoe et al. (2018) explain, we also need to assume information equivalence concerning relevant background features, which is an assumption often broken when people make inferences from one attribute to other attributes:

> [M]anipulating information about a particular attribute will generally alter respondents' beliefs about background attributes in the scenario as well, thus violating information equivalence. Manipulating whether a country is described as "a democracy" or "not a democracy," for example, is likely to affect subjects' beliefs about such background features as the country's geographic location or demographic composition. (Ibid.)

Thus, when researchers tell participants that the tone of debate has been rough, or if they present them with examples of insults that have been made during a debate, people might reasonably infer that the level of issue polarization was high and that politicians disagreed a lot. Similarly, when participants in experimental studies of issue polarization are told that politicians disagree a lot, it is not unlikely that they infer that politicians are also rude to each other. This makes it impossible to know what the independent effects of incivility and issue polarization are, even when researchers are careful in their choice of words.

In my dissertation, I follow two strategies to overcome this challenge. First, in all experiments in which I manipulate levels of elite incivility, I also give participants information about the substantive policy positions of

the involved politicians. In this way, less is left for the imagination of the participants, and the risk of confounding becomes smaller. Second, in all my experiments, I include so-called placebo tests to ensure that my incivility treatment is not inadvertently manipulating perceived issue polarization (see Dafoe et al. 2018) That is, I either ask participants how much they think the parties agreed or disagreed on the political issues in question, or I ask them to rate the politicians on ideological scales.

While both of these steps are simple, they constitute major improvements compared to prior studies of incivility. Researchers in this field have typically not been concerned with issues of confounding, and a review of all articles published on the effects of elite incivility in the past 10 years shows that post-treatment measures of issue polarization were included in only one study (for this review, see the appendix material following Article A).

Second Challenge: Unrealistic Treatment Material

In Article B, I suggest that partisans will react differently to different degrees of incivility and punish their own leaders for only rather strong insults. However, this prediction says little about whether partisans regularly punish their own side or not, which will depend on how rude politicians are compared to how rude they have to be to create an in-party backlash. In other words, my theory predicts that different operationalizations of the underlying phenomenon (incivility) will yield different results, but it is not clear what type of operationalization is most typical of the phenomena in the real world.

This is a common problem within experimental research. It is almost always the case that our results depend crucially on the specific treatments that we use, and scholars like Barabas and Jerit (2010) have argued that

researchers often rely on treatment material that is "too strong" or "unrealistic," producing results that say little about real-world effects. They write:

> The issue [of external validity] goes beyond the representativeness of the subjects. [...] When scholars embed experiments in opinion surveys, they must consider whether the treatments themselves are externally valid [...] To the extent that treatments in survey experiments are overly strong or atypical, the observed effects may not generalize beyond the particular study at hand. (Ibid.)

However, the existing methodological literature provides little guidance when it comes to assessing whether treatment material is "overly strong" or not. Handbooks of experimental methods usually advise researchers to examine whether "another manipulation of the same independent variable would produce the same experimental effect" (Mutz 2011, 167), but it is not clear what researchers should do if this does not happen. That is, if researchers obtain different results when operationalizing the same concept in different ways, how can they know what the more realistic treatment was? Is there any way to move beyond the gut feelings that often characterize discussions about the external validity of experimental treatments?

One strategy is to use observational data or natural experiments as a benchmark, which is also what Barabas and Jerit (2010) do to evaluate the external validity of their survey experiments. Yet, we often turn to experiments exactly because the effects of our phenomenon of interest are hard to isolate using observational data. For instance, elite incivility is correlated with substantive disagreement and many other signals in the real world, and this is probably one of the reasons why researchers have typically relied on experiments when examining its effects.

Another strategy is to stay in the experimental setting but to use real-life communication as treatment material. To be more specific, researchers

can collect large samples of communication, have them coded along the independent variable of interest, and then present participants with random elements from this pool (see, e.g., Ruder 2014). While this strategy certainly has the advantage of ensuring the external of the treatment material, it has the disadvantage of reducing the internal validity as researchers are no longer capable of holding everything constant that correlates with the phenomenon of interest.

In Article C, I present a novel way of addressing this challenge that avoids the pitfalls described above.[1] The method involves locating one's artificial treatment material on the real-life distribution of one's independent variable, and it is particularly useful when studying political communication. The logic behind the method is quite simple, and it involves two steps that one should undertake before conducting an experiment. First, one gathers a random sample of occurrences of the phenomenon one wishes to study the effects of. In my case, I gathered a random sample of tweets in which politicians were criticizing each other. Second, this random sample of material is crowdcoded along the variable of interest, and the treatment material one wishes to use in the later experiment should also be coded. In my case, I had all tweets coded for how rude or polite the politicians were being when attacking each other, and I also had a series of mock tweets coded that I would later use in an experiment. In this way, I could estimate the real-life distribution of incivility in twitter attacks and locate my treatment material on this distribution.

[1] The two-step method described in this paragraph is, to the best of my knowledge, new and has not been used before within political science. However, I am certainly not the first to consider the real-life distribution of a phenomenon when choosing how much an independent variable should vary in an experiment (see, e.g., Olsen 2017). Neither am I the first to rely on content analysis to inform experimental research (see, e.g., de Vreese 2003).

Third Challenge: The Unobserved Population

The first part of my third sub-question asks to what extent the visual portrayal of politicians is systematically skewed, making them appear more uncivil than they are. However, it is no easy task to show that the media is biased in this way—or in any other way for that matter. The major challenge to documenting any kind of selection bias in the news is that researchers usually observe only what is reported in, and not the underlying population of potential news elements that the media are sampling from. On this "problem of the unobserved population," Groeling (2013) writes:

> In most cases, only the news organizations that assembled the stories are aware of the potential stories that were not selected for distribution. Outside observers——especially prior to the advent of new media——could only view the final product of the newsgathering process; any "raw material" that ended up on the cutting-room floor was part of an unobserved population. (Ibid.)

How can this problem be overcome? Within the gatekeeping literature, researchers have tried different strategies to observe the otherwise unobservable population (see Groeling 2013; Soroka 2012). For instance, in the seminal study by Lang and Lang (1953), 31 on-ground observers watched a parade, making it possible to compare their impressions to televised coverage. However, more recent studies have adopted less costly approaches. For instance, Groeling and Baum (2009) coded statements by partisans on Sunday morning interviews, and they then compared these statements to the ones that were included in the evening news. Similarly, Elmelund-Præstekær and Mølgaard-Svensson (2014) compared the statements made in Danish election debates to the statements subsequently cited by newspapers.

Inspired by these studies, I propose a novel way of examining selection biases related to visual material. Specifically, I focus on political debates

in presidential election campaigns, which have the advantage of being video recorded in full length, and footage is available through C-SPAN in which both candidates are visible during the entire debates (split-screen coverage). Thus, it is possible to draw random samples of still images from these debates and have these coded to obtain estimates of how frequent different types of uncivil behavior—like shouting, cross-talking, and pointing—were. These estimates can then be compared to estimates of how frequent such behavior is in post-debate coverage, thereby overcoming the problem of the unobserved population. This is a new approach, making it possible to study the media selection of not only verbal or written content.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have discussed three major methodological problems concerned with both internal (experimental confounding) and external validity (unrealistic treatment material), as well as with how researchers can systematically study the choices of actors that we cannot easily observe (the unobserved population). While the solutions provided relate to the specific sub-questions asked in this dissertation, they are also relevant to researchers studying other phenomena. For instance, experimental researchers studying phenomena like negative campaigning and strategic game frames might be able to move past the divergent findings that characterize the literatures on these topics (e.g., Aalberg et al. 2012; Lau et al. 2007) if they systematically examined how representative different operationalizations of these phenomena are. Likewise, researchers studying media biases related to gender or ideology might use the approach outlined in Article C to examine whether differences in how women or politicians with certain beliefs are depicted are due to differences in their behavior or due to differences in how they are portrayed by the media.

Chapter 4

Main Findings

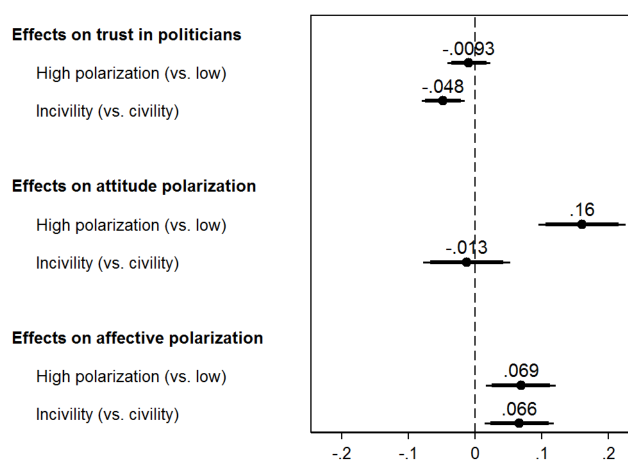
In this chapter, I answer my three sub-questions by presenting the main results from each of the three articles. When presenting the results, I also provide brief accounts of the methods and data used, but the reader can rest assured that more detailed descriptions will follow in the individual papers.

Answering the First Sub-Question

In Article A, the goal is to disentangle and compare the effects of issue polarization and incivility. I do so by relying one main study and two follow-up studies. In the following, I focus only on the experimental main study, but it should be noted that the results are highly robust.

The main study consists of an experiment, which was embedded in a survey administered to a nationally representative sample (on age, gender, geography, and education) of adult Americans. Participants were given vignettes describing the level of issue polarization and the level of incivility on two issues, which some members of Congress were supposedly working on. The experiment had a 2x2 design as both the level of issue polarization and the level of incivility was manipulated in the study. To manipulate issue polarization, participants were told that the differences of opinion were large and that most members of each party were on the same side as

Figure 4.1: Main results from Article A



Notes: OLS regression coefficients. The error bars correspond to 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals.

the rest of their party, or they were told that differences of opinion were small and that members of each party could be found on both sides of the issue. To manipulate incivility, participants were told that the tone of debate had either been very harsh or quite respectful, and they were also given some quotes that were supposedly from a leading Republican and a leading Democrat. After reading these vignettes, participants were given two different questions asking them to rate how much they trusted the politicians in Congress working on each of the two issues.

The effect of incivility and issue polarization on trust in politicians can be seen in the top part of in Figure 4.1. As we can see, the effect of incivility is about -0.05 points (scale from 0 to 1) and statistically significant, while the effect of issue polarization is -0.01 and not statistically significant. Furthermore, the effect of incivility is statistically different from the effect of issue polarization at an level of 0.1 (p=0.097, Wald test). Thus, it is in fact incivility, and not extreme issue positions, that alienate people from politicians.

To some, this may come as good news. Disagreement over policies is often considered to be part and parcel of living in a democratic society, and

even strong differences of opinion between politicians are usually considered legitimate (e.g., Mill 1859). In this light, it is probably a good thing that people can cope with polarization without losing trust in politicians. However, the results from this first article also show that issue polarization is not entirely without effects that we might consider problematic. As Figure 1 shows, issue polarization leads to opinion polarization, meaning that the gulf in terms of policy attitudes between ordinary Republicans and Democrats becomes wider, and it also leads to affective polarization in the form of an increased dislike for the opposing party and its leaders.

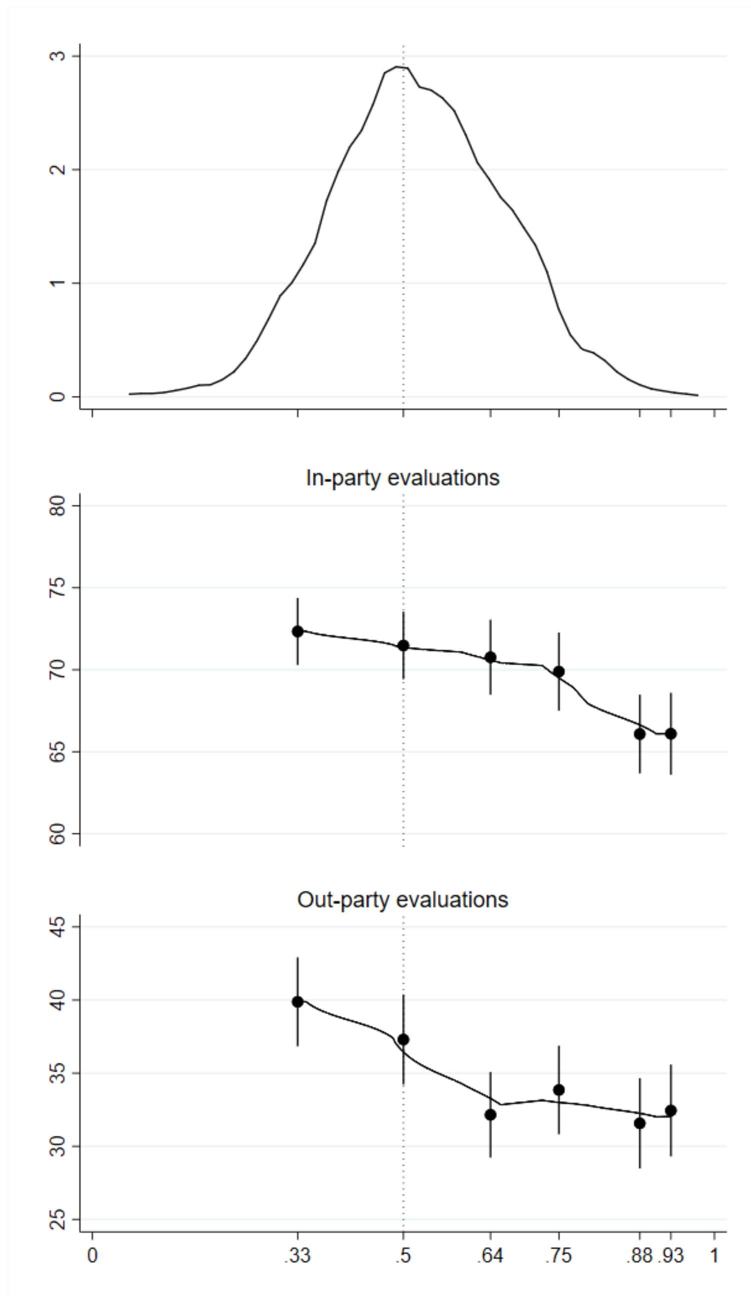
Answering the Second Sub-Question

In Article B, I raise the possibility that partisans will lower their evaluations of their own side only when faced with rather strong incivility, and I also examine how common such incivility is in actual communication by politicians. To do so, I rely on a multitude of data, but my most important piece of evidence comes from a study in which I combine survey experimental data with a large content analysis, which is what I focus on here.

The setup of the study was as follows: I first obtained a large, random sample of tweets in which members of Congress were attacking each other, and each of these were then crowdcoded by several workers on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to map the real-life distribution of (perceived) incivility among top-level American politicians. Furthermore, I also had a series of mock tweets coded that I would use in a later experiment. These tweets were all based on the same generic baseline tweet, but they varied in their level of incivility.

Second, I conducted an experiment, which was embedded in surveys administered to both a representative sample (on age, gender, and geography) of adult Americans and a convenience sample on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. In the experiment, participants were presented with a short description of Harry Miller, a politician supposedly running for Congress. The

Figure 4.2: Main results from Article B



Notes: The distribution on top is the kernel density estimate showing the distribution of incivility in real-life tweets in which American members of Congress express disagreement or criticize other politicians. The points in the plots below are average thermometer ratings of Harry Miller in each of the six treatment conditions, and the error bars correspond to 95 percent confidence intervals. The lines in the plots below are kernel-weighted local-mean smoothings with a bandwidth of 0.07.

description included information about his political views and one of the mock tweets in which he was attacking Senate members from the opposing party. It was randomized whether Harry Miller was a Republican or a Democrat, and it was also varied how rude Harry Miller was in the tweet.

The results can be seen in Figure 4.2. The density plot on top shows the distribution of incivility (as perceived by the coders) in the real tweets in which politicians are attacking other politicians. The scale goes from 0 (very polite) to 1 (very rude). Below, we see the thermometer ratings of Harry Miller by in- and out-partisans at different degrees degrees of incivility.[1] Looking first at out-party ratings, see that the line slopes downward at first and then flattens out. This indicates that partisans punish out-party politicians for moderate incivility, which the density plot above shows is very common when politicians attack each other in real life. Furthermore, the flattening of the line shows that the marginal effect is decreasing, indicating that it matters little to partisans whether an out-party candidate is slightly rude or very rude. However, the in-party ratings in middle part of the figure paints a different picture. Here, the line is almost completely flat, and it starts to slope downward only once we approach the tail of the distribution. This indicates that partisans only punish incivility by their own side when it is very extreme, which politicians seldom are. Of course, it is difficult to determine exactly when partisans start to punish their own side, but even if one chooses a conservative tipping point, such incivility appears rare. For instance, only eight percent of the real tweets that were rated to be at least somewhat uncivil (i.e., above 0.5 on the scale) have a rating above 0.75, and only four percent have a rating above 0.80. Thus, it seems that partisans will seldom punish their own side for being as uncivil as politicians are currently being.

[1] The results presented here are for both samples pooled.

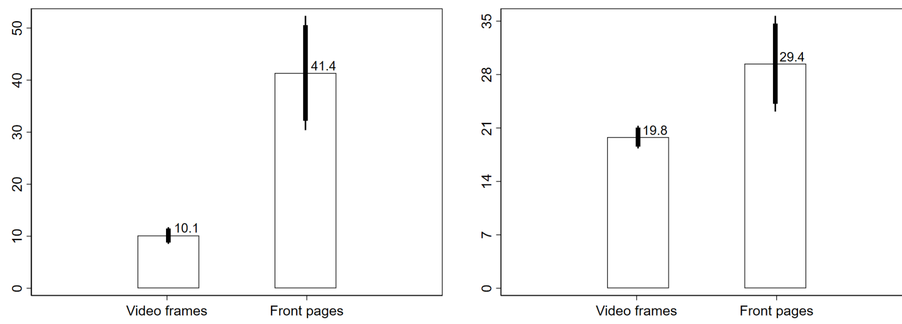
Answering the Third Sub-Question

The first part of my third sub-question asks to what extent the media overrepresent images in which politicians appear uncivil. In Article C, I answer this question by comparing random samples of still images from four presidential and vicepresidential debates to the images used in post-debate coverage. Specifically, I look at how often politicians are depicted as shouting, cross-talking, and pointing at the opponent, which are three types of behavior typically considered uncivil in the context of American political debates (see, e.g., Mutz 2007; Stryker et al. 2016; Sydnor 2018).

To obtain a sample of images from post-debate coverage, I relied on the photos featured on the front pages of 57 American newspapers the day after each debate. To obtain a sample of visuals from the debates, I extracted a still image every 15th second from the televised version of each debate, using the split-screen recordings from C-SPAN's archives. From this original pool of images, I created two datasets. To create the first dataset, images were split so there was only one politician in each photo, and they were afterward cropped into smaller images of equal size containing only the faces of the politicians. These images would be used to code speech, which is necessary to test the overrepresentation of shouting and cross-talking. To create the second dataset, the original images were again split, but this time they were cropped in a manner that left as much as possible of each body visible. These images would be used to code pointing. The images in these two datasets were coded by coders recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk.

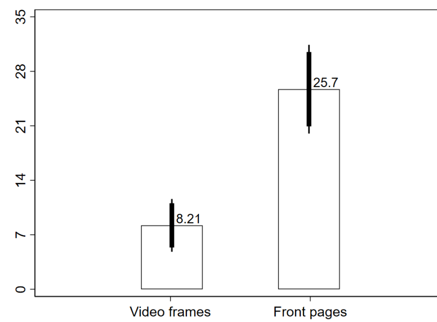
The overall results are shown in Figure 4.3. As we can see, all three types of behavior are heavily overrepresented in the news when compared to how common they are in actual debates. In Article C, I furthermore explore whether this overrepresentation is also evident when using more conservative benchmarks, such as action-filled debate images or images in the archives of news agencies. I find that this is the case with regards to

Figure 4.3: Main results from Article C



(a) Cross-talking (%)

(b) Shouting (%)



(c) Pointing (%)

Notes: The unit of analysis is images that include both politicians in panel (a) (N=1,449) and individual politicians in panel (b) (N=2,967) and (c) (N=502). Error bars represent 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals.

both pointing and cross-talking.

To answer the second part of my third sub-question, Article C also contains two survey experiments in which I examine the effects of visuals indicating uncivil behavior. In these, I show that politicians seem more uncivil in the eyes of the public when they are depicted as shouting, pointing, and cross-talking, and I also show that such images make it less important whether the textual framing of an article supports this conclusion. That is, when politicians look uncivil, people will to some extent believe that they are being so, regardless of what is written about their behavior. In sum, it seems that the visual choices of the media might play an important role in making politicians seem so rude.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have answered my three sub-questions. The results show that incivility does indeed make citizens lose trust in their elected officials, that partisans will seldom punish their own side for being uncivil, and that the media's visual coverage of politics makes incivility seem more common than it is. In the next chapter, I discuss the generalizability and implications of these findings.

Chapter 5

Discussion: The Unanswered Questions

If everyone hates incivility, why are politicians so rude? This was the paradoxical question that motivated my research question, and I have now shown that the two premises underlying the puzzle need to be revised. First, politicians are not always punished for being rude, and second, the media make politicians appear more uncivil than they are. Before concluding, I here discuss two issues related to these overall findings. The first is whether these findings are applicable to the Danish case, and the second is whether politicians can in any way benefit from being uncivil.

What About Denmark?

Throughout the dissertation, I have relied solely on American data, but perhaps the results would have been different had I studied incivility by Danish politicians affecting Danish citizens. In this regard, I think there are at least two major questions worth considering.

The first question is whether Danish party identifiers would be as willing to tolerate incivility by their own leaders as American party identifiers are. In particular, it might be the case that feelings of animosity toward the

other side are greater in the United States and that partisans are, therefore, more ready to accept uncivil attacks directed at the opposition. The literature on mass polarization is certainly dominated by studies focusing on the United States, and Iyengar et al. (2012) have shown that negative affect toward those identifying with the opposite party has been steadily rising in America. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that feelings of animosity are greater than in Denmark. Unfortunately, there are no studies comparing the level of affective polarization in the United States to the level in Denmark or in other European countries. The closest one comes to such a study is Reiljan (2016), but his study is limited to comparing polarization across European countries and does not focus on the American case. However, Reiljan (2016) does show that affective polarization is relative low in Denmark and the other Nordic countries compared to the rest of Europe. Thus, it is not unlikely that hostile feelings toward outpartisans are also less pronounced than in the United States. If this is the case, Danish politicians might be more constrained by the electorate than their American counterparts when it comes to keeping a civil tone, which might be part of the explanation why incivility is not being debated as a problem to the same extent in Denmark.

The second question is whether and to what extent the Danish news media behave like the American news media by overrepresenting images in which politicians appear uncivil. If we believe that this overrepresentation is driven by the psychological negativity bias of journalists, editors, and photographers, we might expect there to be no difference, since this negativity bias is usually considered an almost universal human phenomenon (Rozin and Royzman 2001). However, if the visual incivility bias is caused by certain interpretations of news values or by characteristics of the media system, there might be a difference between the two countries. For instance, Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2012) have argued that the commercial incentives of the news media are stronger in the United States than in most European countries, which makes them rely more heavily on conflict frames

when covering political elections.[1] Thus, it seems plausible that American news media will also emphasize conflict more in their visual coverage of politics, which might be another explanation why debates about incivility in politics are much less pronounced in Denmark.

In sum, the findings of the present dissertation might be relevant to Danish politics, but there are also differences between the two countries that can make both citizens and the media respond differently to incivility. Thus, I consider it a fruitful avenue for future studies to examine incivility in a comparative perspective. Perhaps such studies will also help us understand why incivility seems such a big problem in the United States but not so in many European countries.

Are There Benefits to Being Rude?

In Article B, I showed that politicians are seldom punished by their own base for being uncivil, yet I did not show that they were awarded for behaving rudely. Thus, it remains unclear whether there are any advantages to being uncivil. Even if politicians are not as uncivil as they are often perceived to be, incivility certainly exists, and it thus makes sense to consider why politicians sometimes turn to rude behavior.

The perhaps most obvious possibility is that incivility makes voters like the target of the uncivil behavior less. That is, perhaps being rude does not make a politician more popular, but it might make the opponents less so. However, I show in Article B that there are no signs of this being the case. Turning to incivility does not lower evaluations of the target and this

[1] However, the "problem of the unobserved population" makes it hard to draw firm inferences about what causes the differences that Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2012) observe in their comparative analysis of Sweden and the United States. In particular, by only comparing what is reported *in the news* in the two countries, it is hard to know whether the observed differences are caused by differences in the behavior of the media or by differences in the behavior of politicians in the two countries.

is true regardless of whether one looks at the average effect among all voters or restricts the analysis to focusing on supporters of either party.

A second possibility, which I consider more likely, is that the benefit of being uncivil does not relate to the immediate reactions of voters but to the extra media attention that being uncivil generates (for a similar suggestion, see Druckman et al. 2018). As Article C shows, uncivil behavior is more likely to be covered by the media than civil behavior, which might give politicians an incentive to behave badly. Geer (2012) has previously proposed a similar explanation when trying to explain why politicians turn to negative campaigning, and it certainly seems plausible that a politician like Donald Trump would not have gotten the attention he did in his presidential campaign had he not turned to frequent name-calling and derogatory remarks. Of course, it might seem that this extra attention is of little value given that the experimental evidence suggests that uncivil messages do not make a politician more popular. However, one must bear in mind that there was no condition with no tweet in Article B and that it might be the case that being heard saying something uncivil is better for a politician than not being heard at all.

Final Words

This dissertation shows that conventional wisdom regarding incivility in American politics needs to be revised in two fundamental ways. First, while citizens consistently claim to dislike incivility in politics, they do not always punish politicians for rude behavior. In particular, partisans seldom punish their own side, at least not for the degrees of incivility that are most commonly found in real communication from politicians. This means that politicians may not be as out of sync with ordinary citizens as we think and we cannot expect the wrath of voters to temper the behavior of all elected officials. Specifically, politicians who are relatively dependent on their partisan base will have little incentive to behave civilly toward

the other side, which might explain why it is among those elected in safe districts that we find most incivility (Pew Research Center 2016).

Second, the dissertation shows that politicians are not as uncivil as we might think they are. Perceived levels of rudeness are heavily influenced by the way politicians are visually depicted in the news, and the media overrepresent images in which politicians appear to be shouting, pointing, and cross-talking. Of course, my findings do not show that politicians are never rude, or that incivility has not risen in recent years, but they do suggest the visual choices of the media contribute to creating the so-called "civility crisis" of American politics.

Bibliography

Aalberg T, Strömbäck J and de Vreese CH (2012) The framing of politics as strategy and game: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, **13** (2):162–178.

Ahuja S (2008) *Congress Behaving Badly: The Rise of Partisanship and Incivility and the Death of Public Trust*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

Anderson AA, Brossard D, Scheufele DA, Xenos MA and Ladwig P (2014) The "Nasty Effect:" Online Incivility and Risk Perceptions of Emerging Technologies. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, **19** (3):373–387.

Barabas J and Jerit J (2010) Are Survey Experiments Externally Valid? *American Political Science Review*, **104** (02):226–242.

Borah P (2014) Does It Matter Where You Read the News Story? Interaction of Incivility and News Frames in the Political Blogosphere. *Communication Research*, **41** (6):809–827.

Brooks DJ and Geer JG (2007) Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate. *American Journal of Political Science*, **51** (1):1–16.

Brunet PM, Cowie R, Donnan H and Douglas-Cowie E (2012) Politeness and social signals. *Cognitive Processing*, **13** (S2):447–453.

Bucy EP and Grabe ME (2007) Taking Television Seriously: A Sound and Image Bite Analysis of Presidential Campaign Coverage, 1992–2004. *Journal of Communication*, **57** (4):652–675.

Bybee KJ (2018) The Rise of Trump and the Death of Civility. *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, **Forthcoming**.

Citrin J and Stoker L (2018) Political Trust in a Cynical Age. *Annual Review of Political Science*, **21** (1):49–70.

Culpeper J (2010) Conventionalised impoliteness formulae. *Journal of Pragmatics*, **42** (12):3232–3245.

Culpeper J (2011) *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambrdige: Cambridge University Press.

Dafoe A, Zhang B and Caughey D (2018) Information Equivalence in Survey Experiments. *Political Analysis*, **26** (4):399–416.

Dahl RA (1961) *Who Governs?* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Dimitrova DV and Strömbäck J (2012) Election news in Sweden and the United States: A comparative study of sources and media frames. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, **13** (5):604–619.

Dodd LC and Schraufnagel S (2013) Taking Incivility Seriously. In **Frisch SA and Kelly SQ** (eds.), *Politics to the Extreme: American Political Institutions in the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, pp. 71–91.

Dowling CM, Krupnikov Y and Thompson WR (2016) The Effects of Negative Advertising. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

Druckman J, Gubitz SR, Levendusky MS and Lloyd A (2018) How Incivility On Partisan Media (De-)Polarizes the Electorate. *The Journal of Politics*, **Forthcoming**.

Easton D (1953) *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Elmelund-Præstekær C and Mølgaard-Svensson H (2014) Negative and Personalized Campaign Rhetoric: Party Communication and Media Coverage of Danish Parliamentary Elections 1994–2011. *World Political Science*, **10** (2):365–384.

Forgette R and Morris JS (2006) High-Conflict Television News and Public Opinion. *Political Research Quarterly*, **59** (3):447–456.

Fridkin KL and Kenney P (2011) Variability in Citizens' Reactions to Different Types of Negative Campaigns. *American Journal of Political Science*, **55** (2):307–325.

Fridkin KL and Kenney PJ (2004) Do Negative Messages Work?: The Impact of Negativity on Citizens' Evaluations of Candidates. *American Politics Research*, **32** (5):570–605.

Frimer JA and Skitka LJ (2018) The Montagu Principle: Incivility Decreases Politicians' Public Approval, even with their Political Base. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **Forthcoming**.

Gaines BJ, Kuklinski JH, Quirk PJ, Peyton B and Verkuilen J (2007) Same Facts, Different Interpretations: Partisan Motivation and Opinion on Iraq. *Journal of Politics*, **69** (4):957–974.

Geer JG (2012) The News Media and the Rise of Negativity in Presidential Campaigns. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, **45** (3):422–427.

Gervais BT (2015) Incivility Online: Affective and Behavioral Reactions to Uncivil Political Posts in a Web-based Experiment. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, **12** (2):167–185.

Gervais BT (2018) Rousing the Partisan Combatant: Elite Incivility, Anger, and Antideliberative Attitudes. *Political Psychology*, **Forthcoming**.

Graber DA (1996) Say it with Pictures. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, **546** (1):85–96.

Groeling T (2013) Media Bias by the Numbers: Challenges and Opportunities in the Empirical Study of Partisan News. *Annual Review of Political Science*, **16** (1):129–151.

Groeling T and Baum MA (2009) Journalists' Incentives and Media Coverage of Elite Foreign Policy Evaluations. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, **26** (5):437–470.

Herbst S (2010) *Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Huddy L, Mason L and Aarøe L (2015) Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity. *American Political Science Review*, **109** (1):1–17.

Iyengar S, Sood G and Lelkes Y (2012) Affect, Not Ideology. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **76** (3):405–431.

Jamieson KH (2011) Civility in Congress (1935-2011) as reflected in the Taking Down process. Technical report, Annenberg Public Policy Center.

Kinder DR and Palfrey TR (1993) *Experimental Foundations of Political Science*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

King DC (1997) The polarization of American parties and mistrust of government. In **Nye JS, Zelikow PD and King DC** (eds.), *Why people don't trust government*, Cambridge, MA:: Harvard University Press, pp. 155–178.

LaHood R and Mackaman FH (2015) *Seeking Bipartisanship: My Life in Politics*. Cambria Press.

Lang K and Lang GE (1953) The Unique Perspective of Television and Its Effect: A Pilot Study. *American Sociological Review*, **18** (1):3–12.

Lau RR and Rovner IB (2009) Negative Campaigning. *Annual Review of Political Science*, **12** (1):285–306.

Lau RR, Sigelman L and Rovner IB (2007) The Effects of Negative Political Campaigns: A Meta-Analytic Reassessment. *Journal of Politics*, **69** (4):1176–1209.

Leeper TJ and Slothuus R (2014) Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Public Opinion Formation. *Political Psychology*, **35** (S1):129–156.

Levendusky M (2009) *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Levendusky MS (2010) Clearer Cues, More Consistent Voters: A Benefit of Elite Polarization. *Political Behavior*, **32** (1):111–131.

Maisel LS (2012) The Negative Consequences of Uncivil Political Discourse. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, **45** (3):405–411.

McCarty N, Poole KT and Rosenthal H (2016) *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Messaris P and Abraham L (2001) The Role of Images in Framing News Stories. In **Reese SD, Gandy OH and Grant AE** (eds.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Routledge, pp. 307–326.

Mill JS (1859) *On Liberty*. J. W. Parker and Son.

Muddiman A (2017) Personal and Public Levels of Political Incivility. *International Journal of Communication*, **11** (0):3182–3202.

Mutz D (2017) Response to Kyle Mattes and David P. Redlawsk's review of In—Your-Face Politics: The Consequences of Uncivil Media. *Perspectives on Politics*, **15** (1):194–195.

Mutz DC (2007) Effects of "In-Your-Face" Television Discourse on Perceptions of a Legitimate Opposition. *American Political Science Review*, **101** (4):621–635.

Mutz DC (2011) *Population-Based Survey Experiments*. Princeton University Press.

Mutz DC (2015) *In-Your-Face Politics*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Mutz DC and Reeves B (2005) The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust. *American Political Science Review*, **99** (1):1–15.

Olsen AL (2017) Compared to What? How Social and Historical Reference Points Affect Citizens' Performance Evaluations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, **27** (4):562–580.

Paivio A and Csapo K (1973) Picture superiority in free recall: Imagery or dual coding? *Cognitive Psychology*, **5** (2):176–206.

Papacharissi Z (2004) Democracy online: civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media & Society*, **6** (2):259–283.

Paris C (2017) Breaking Down Bipartisanship: When and Why Citizens React to Cooperation across Party Lines. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **81** (2):473–494.

Parker-Stephen E (2013) Tides of Disagreement: How Reality Facilitates (and Inhibits) Partisan Public Opinion. *The Journal of Politics*, **75** (4):1077–1088.

Persily N (2015) Introduction. In **Persily N** (ed.), *Solutions to Political Polarization in America*, Cambridge University Press.

Pew Research Center (2016) Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016.

Quinnipiac Polling Institute (2018) QU Poll Release Detail.

Redlawsk DP, Civettini AJW and Emmerson KM (2010) The Affective Tipping Point: Do Motivated Reasoners Ever "Get It"? *Political Psychology*, **31** (4):563–593.

Reiljan A (2016) Affective Polarization in European Party Systems. p. 28.

Rozin P and Royzman EB (2001) Negativity Bias, Negativity Dominance, and Contagion. *Personality & Social Psychology Review (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates)*, **5** (4):296–320.

Ruder AI (2014) Institutional Design and the Attribution of Presidential Control: Insulating the President from Blame. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, **9** (3):301–335.

Schraufnagel S (2005) Testing the implications of incivility in the United States Congress, 1977–2000: The case of judicial confirmation delay. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, **11** (2):216–234.

Shea DM and Fiorina MP (2013) *Can We Talk?: The Rise of Rude, Nasty, Stubborn Politics*. Pearson.

Sobieraj S and Berry JM (2011) From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News. *Political Communication*, **28** (1):19–41.

Soroka SN (2012) The Gatekeeping Function: Distributions of Information in Media and the Real World. *The Journal of Politics*, **74** (2):514–528.

Stevens D, Allen B, Sullivan J and Lawrence E (2015) Fair's Fair? Principles, Partisanship, and Perceptions of the Fairness of Campaign Rhetoric. *British Journal of Political Science*, **45** (1):195–213.

Stevens D, Sullivan J, Allen B and Alger D (2008) What's Good for the Goose is Bad for the Gander: Negative Political Advertising, Partisanship, and Turnout. *The Journal of Politics*, **70** (2):527–541.

Stryker R, Conway BA and Danielson JT (2016) What is political incivility? *Communication Monographs*, **83** (4):535–556.

Sydnor E (2018) Platforms for Incivility: Examining Perceptions Across Different Media Formats. *Political Communication*, **35** (1):97–116.

Trussler M and Soroka S (2014) Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, **19** (3):360–379.

Uslaner EM (1993) *The Decline of Comity in Congress*. University of Michigan Press.

de Vreese C (2003) *Framing Europe: Television News and European Integration*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

York C (2013) Cultivating Political Incivility: Cable News, Network News, and Public Perceptions. *Electronic News*, **7** (3):107–125.

Dansk resumé

Mudderkastning og personlige angreb på politiske modstandere synes at være blevet en fast bestanddel af ikke mindst amerikansk politik, og i de seneste årtier har en række studier inden for statskundskab og kommunikation undersøgt, hvordan dette påvirker borgerne. Det måske mest konsistente fund i denne litteratur er, at borgerne ikke kan lide uhøflig opførsel, og at de vurderer uhøflige politikere mindre favorabelt end høflige politikere. Selvom disse fund kan synes åbenlyse, så rejser de et paradoks: For hvis vælgerne hader uhøflig opførsel, hvorfor er politikere så så grove ved hinanden? Er politikerne virkelig så dumme? Eller er det snarere de underliggende præmisser i dette spørgsmål, som er forkerte? I denne afhandling undersøger jeg den sidste mulighed. Konkret består afhandlingen af tre artikler, som udforsker, om politikere er så grove, som vi tror, og om almindelige borgere vitterligt ikke kan lide uhøflige politikere.

I den første artikel (Artikel A: Dimension of Elite Partisan Polarization) spørger jeg, om det er uhøflig opførsel, som får folk til at miste tillid til politikere, eller om det er substantiel uenighed. I tidligere studier er disse to ting ofte blevet blandet sammen, så det er svært at adskille deres effekter. Eksempelvis har stimulusmaterialet i tidligere eksperimenter ofte bestået af fornærmelser med ideologisk indhold, som ikke bare signalerer, at de givne politikere er uhøflige, men også at der er politiske forskelle mellem dem. Jeg kortlægger i denne artikel den unikke effekt af uhøflighed og emnepolarisering gennem to surveyeksperimenter og en survey uden et eksperiment.

I den anden artikel (Artikel B: Degrees of Disrespect) spørger jeg, om

partitilhængere virkelig straffer deres egne politikere for at være uhøflige over for deres modstandere, hvilket tidligere studier har vist, at de gør. Jeg trækker her på nyere teorier om motiveret ræsonnering, og jeg foreslår, at kun er ekstremt uhøflig opførsel, der får partilhængere til at synes dårligere om deres egne politikere. Ydermere foreslår jeg, at sådan opførsel er yderst sjælden, og at typisk mudderkastning kun sænker evaluringen af en politiker blandt dem, som ikke holder med vedkommendes parti. Jeg trækker i denne artikel på tre surveyeksperimenter, fire surveys uden eksperimenter og en *crowdsourced* indholdanalyse af 24.000 Twitter-beskeder.

I den tredje artikel (Artikel C: The Visual Incivility Bias) spørger jeg, om politikerne virkelig er så uhøflige, som de ofte fremstår. Jeg trækker i denne artikel på teorier om negativitetsbias, visuel kommunikation og gatekeeping. Jeg foreslår, at medierne systematisk overrepræsenterer billeder af politikere, som skændes, og at disse billeder har en stærk effekt på, hvor uhøflige politikere opfattes. Jeg tester disse forudsigelser gennem en *crowdsourced* indholdanalyse af næsten 9.000 billeder fra præsidentielle og vicepræsidentielle debatter og gennem to surveyeksperimenter.

Overordnet set viser afhandlingen, at der er grund til at revidere de antagelser, som ligger bag paradokset præsenteret ovenfor. For det første bliver politikere ikke altid straffet for at være ubehøvlede over for deres modstandere. Selvom det faktisk er uhøflighed og ikke substantiel uenighed, som får folk til at miste tillid til politikere, så straffer partitilhængere sjældent deres egne ledere. For det andet giver mediernes visuelle prioriteringer indtryk af, at politikere er mere ubehøvlede, end de er, og vores folkevalgte er således ikke alene ansvarlige for, at mudderkastning virker så udbredt.

English Summary

Mudslinging and personal attacks on political opponents seem to have become a constituent part of American politics, and in recent decades, a number of studies within political science and communication have investigated how uncivil behavior affects citizens. The perhaps most consistent finding in this literature is that citizens do not like rude behavior and that they evaluate rude politicians less favorably than they evaluate polite politicians. While these findings may seem obvious, they raise a paradox: If everyone hates incivility, why are politicians so rude? Are politicians really so out of touch with what voters want? Or is it the assumptions underlying this paradox that might wrong? In this thesis, I explore the latter possibility. Specifically, the dissertation consists of three individual articles, examining whether politicians are really as uncivil as they appear and whether citizens always punish them for being rude to their opponents.

In the first article (Article A: Dimension of Elite Partisan Polarization), I ask if it is rude behavior that causes people to lose confidence in politicians or whether it is substantive disagreement on policies. In previous studies, these two things have often been confounded, making it difficult to separate their effects. For example, the stimulus material in earlier experiments has often consisted of insults with ideological content, signaling not only that politicians are rude but also that they are far apart in terms of policies. Thus, the purpose of the first article is to explore the unique effects of incivility and issue polarization, which I do relying on two survey experiments and a survey without an experiment.

In the second article (Article B: Degrees of Disrespect), I ask whether partisans actually punish their own politicians for being rude to their opponents, which previous studies have suggested that they do. Building on theories of motivated reasoning, I suggest that only rather extreme incivility makes partisans lower their evaluations of their own side. Furthermore, I suggest that such incivility is quite rare in real elite communication, and that most incivility hurts a politician's standing only among out-partisans. I test these propositions using three survey experiments, four surveys without experiments, and a crowdsourced content analysis of 24,000 tweets.

In the third article (Article C: The Visual Incivility Bias), I ask if politicians are really as rude as they often appear. Drawing on theories of negativity bias, visual communication, and gatekeeping, I suggest that the news media systematically overrepresent images of politicians arguing, and that these images have strong effects on how rude politicians are perceived to be. These predictions are tested through a crowdsourced content analysis of almost 9,000 images from presidential and vice-presidential debates and two survey experiments.

Overall, the dissertation shows that we need to revise the two assumptions underlying the paradox outlined above. First, politicians are not always punished for being uncivil. Although it is indeed rude behavior and not substantive disagreement that causes people to lose trust in politicians, partisans rarely punish their own leaders. Second, the visual priorities of the news media give citizens the impression that politicians are more rude than they are. Thus, our elected officials are not solely to blame for their image of always being at each other's throats.